

LECTURES

TO

EDUCATED NATIVE YOUNG MEN.

LECTURE FOURTH, BY THE REV. K. M. BANNERJEA.

ON VEDANTISM.

FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN !—The subject on which I have undertaken to address you this evening, derives peculiar interest from the importance which the ancient philosophers of India attached to it, and from the credit it has obtained among many of our own contemporaries of influence and respectability. It was to the Vedant that our ancestors, ashamed of the puerile observances and ceremonies of popular Hinduism, and perhaps disgusted with its impure doctrines and legends ; but desirous nevertheless of escaping the dangerous shoals of open Atheism, as well as of satisfying the spiritual longings of their hearts—sought to betake themselves, as to a place of refuge and strength ; and it is ostensibly in the same Vedant, that many of our educated countrymen of the present day, regardless of the lessons which the ill success of their predecessors

might have suggested, strive to find shelter, amid the perplexities which the errors and absurdities of the Hindu idolatry have a tendency to produce.

A subject, such as this, must attract more than ordinary attention as well from those who are desirous of *finding* as also from others who are toiling to *propagate* the truth. To the theological inquirer in India, the Vedant will naturally present itself as a stupendous scheme after which Vyás and Sankarácárya had spent so much thought and learning, and to which many a devotee has in every age looked with such longing interest. Until convinced that Vyás and Sankarácárya had amused their fancies with visions and phantoms—that the longing interest of our devotees was a dangerous delusion, our theological inquirers are likely to be spell-bound by the idea that the system of Vyás and Sankarácárya has a beauty and splendour peculiar to itself; that the time-honoured doctrine of the Vedas is no less grand than it is Indian. Hence the necessity of unraveling its real character—of removing the mysterious veil which, while it hides its genuine features, deceives the spectators by the notion that the grandeur of its true aspect must be unrivalled.

To exhibit Vedantism in its genuine character is my duty this evening. That I have neither faith nor confidence in the system, either as a philosophy or a religion, is I believe well known to you. But that I will not intentionally misrepresent its tenets, may be considered as guaranteed by the precepts of the religion which it is alike my privilege to profess and to preach;—and which repudiates the idea of exaggerating the defects, or detracting from the merits, even of an antagonistic system. The founder of Christianity was no less the Truth, than he was the Way and the Life; and it is an essential character of Truth that it is impatient of misrepresentation and

falsehood even in its own service. The Christian religion neither requires nor tolerates a departure from candour on the part of its advocates. I can therefore assure you, that respect for my own profession will forbid the least dishonesty in the representation of the system on which I am now addressing you.

In order to do as full justice to the subject as the limited space of an evening lecture will allow, I propose first *historically* to trace the origin and to state the definition and dogmas of the Vedanta. I shall next consider how far those dogmas are adapted to the wants of human nature. I shall thirdly advert to the obstacles which a sense of our moral responsibility necessarily throws against their reception either as religious or philosophical truths. Fourthly, I will call in question the authority of the system, and discuss its claims to our assent. Fifthly, I will draw your attention to the attempts recently made to revive the credit of the Vedanta. And may the Supreme Dispenser of all events—who trieth the hearts and reins, overrule all our evil inclinations—and in the exercise of his sovereign power grant, that both the speaker and the hearers may be animated by one common feeling—to set forth His glory and promote the interests of Truth in themselves and in those around them!

I have first historically to trace the origin, and state the definitions and dogmas of the Vedanta. The definition of the system may help us to arrive at its origin. One of its old and most popular propounders has defined the Vedanta to be the system contained in the *Upanishads*, the *Sharirika Sutras* and the like. He says,

वदान्तो नाम उपनिषत् प्रमाणं तदुपकारीणि
शारीरिक सूत्रादीनि च ॥

I need not say that the Upanishads are small appendices to the Brahmanas of the Vedas. The Vedas are

principally divided into two parts, the Sanhitas and the Brahmanas. The Sanhitas contain what may be called the subjective theology of the Vedas recording the spontaneous effusions of such poetico-religious sentiments as the prevalent system of the time was calculated to produce. The Brahmanas may be styled the objective and narrative theology of our ancestors, embodying the discourses and speculations of ancient Brahminical genius. Such portions of the Brahmanas as treat of the nature and existence of Brahma, the Supreme spirit, are dignified by the name of the Upanishads. These Upanishads comprize primarily the Canon of the Vedanta. They are assisted by the Sharirika Sutras, composed by the compiler of the Vedas, and by other kindred expositions of the system.

But though the Upanishads and the Sutras are the primary authorities of the Vedant, it does not ignore the Puranas or any other branch of the Hindu Shasters. The very man who compiled the Vedas and founded the Vedanta is represented also as the author of the Puranas ; there would be little consistency in receiving one class of a man's writings as inspired, while you are discarding another as lying legends. The credit of the Vedant must therefore stand or fall with the whole teaching of the Shasters.

This definition of the Vedanta gives a clue to the origin of the system. A moderate degree of philological acumen will satisfy the reader that the Upanishads which are the fundamental authorities of the Vedanta, are of more recent origin than the other parts of the Vedas. They do not contain such obsolete words and phrases—and such peculiarities of grammar as the Sanhitas. The Sanhitas again do not indicate that full development of Hindu institutions, nor that decided recognition of a fourfold caste, which the Brahmanas and the Upanishads contain. We may therefore safely conclude that the system inculcated in or deduced from

the Upanishads was long posterior to that of the earliest portions of the Vedas.

You will not require many words to convince you that the fable of the eternity of the Vedas is utterly unworthy of belief. That they were co-eval with the creation, or were composed before the language in which they were written was formed, and the men of whom they speak were born ; or that the Sanhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads were the works of the same or contemporary authors is an idea sublimely fantastic. The Sanhitas or hymns present the greatest obstacles themselves to the entertainment of such an idea. The Sanhitas are desultory hymns addressed to specific gods such as Indra, Vayu, or Agni, by certain Rishis, such as Madhu Cchanda, Sunahscpa, or Kanwa, and composed in particular metres, such as Anustubha, Sutanu, Gayatri or Arya ; the god, Rishi, and metre being carefully distinguished, not unlike the manner in which the names of the psalmist and the instruments are inscribed in some of the psalms of David—such as *lamnasseh benginoth mizmore le-David*. Would it not be absurd to say that any psalm, of which David was the author, was written before his birth ? or that a song set to a certain instrument such as negina was composed prior to the invention of that instrument ? No less absurd is it solemnly to assert that the Vedas were coeval with the creation ; that hymns ascribed to Madhu Cchanda existed before his birth, and before the invention of the metre in which it was written.

But I will not detain you on a point so obvious. I will take for granted that you will allow full scope to the philological and historical argument that the Upanishads are compositions of a more recent date than the other portions of the Vedas. Hence the inference is inevitable, that the system deduced from the Upanishads is not the *fundamental* teaching of the Hindu Scriptures,

but originated at a later period than the original system of the Vedas.

What that original system was in all its parts, it would not be easy to decide before the whole of the Vedas is available for reference and examination. The Sanhitas, as far as they are known, appear to be effusions of a crude devotion addressed to the sun and moon—to fire, air, earth, and water, to Indra, Yama, Vishnu, Rudra, and others. The invocations are partly doxological partly supplicatory. The Gods are invited to accept sacrifices, confer blessings, or give audiences to doxologies. These are unmistakeable evidences of a simple, and but imperfectly developed system of idolatry; a system which was perhaps free from the grossness of image-worship, but which nevertheless recognized in the elements and the heavenly bodies—in Indra, Rudra and Vishnu, objects of religious awe, of reverence, and of adoration.

But the doctrines incidentally inculcated in the Sanhitas of the Vedas were without a system. Prayers and invocations were addressed to the elements and fancied gods, without a methodical arrangement of positive dogmas. The poetry of theology preceded its philosophy. The dogmatic enunciation of religious tenets in a scientific way was an after-thought—which gave origin to the different schools of philosophy, and among others to the Vedant itself.

Such in our opinion was the origin of the Vedant. It was intended to harmonize or improve upon the spontaneous effusions of a rude devotion that recognized a god in each of the elements and some of the heavenly bodies. Yaska theorized in a scientific way, and willing to acquit the earlier Vedas of the charge of idolatry, affirmed that the gods were portions of one soul or Atma. Whether the authors of the Upanishads were actuated by the same idea does not clearly appear. Certain it is, that they laboured to form a system of

which the unity of the Godhead was to be an important dogma; but that unity was so qualified as to include diverse creatures, rational and irrational.

The authors of the Upanishads were no doubt above the intellectual degradation indicated by the deification of the elements contained in the earlier Vedas. They were ashamed of a system of such puerile theology. They aspired after a grander idea—a more lofty flight of the imagination—something that might strike the wonder, and call for the reverence of their thoughtful contemporaries; but to which the grovelling idolater who could not raise his contemplations above the visible heavens was unable to reach.

The observations already made on the origin of the Vedant will have prepared you to hear, that it is a far-fetched esoteric system—founded on theories the most visionary, and requiring such an unnatural and forced exercise of our intellectual and active powers as none but a few initiated were capable of. It is however just to premise that in the Upanishads themselves, though the germs are unmistakeable, the full development of the system is not clearly traceable.

In order to take a proper survey of the dogmas of the Vedant, it will be necessary to consider its philosophy as well as its theology. The one is so intimately connected with the other, that the latter will not be fully comprehensible without the former. Indeed the Vedant prides in its philosophy; and sets up KNOWLEDGE as the greatest attribute of a sentient being.

The Vedant philosophy, in common with the Nyāya and the Sāṅkhya, lays down as a first principle in physics, that *out of nothing, nothing can be produced*, or that nothing can exist without a cause. This is a maxim to which no objection can at first sight be conceived. But in the sense in which it is asserted and understood by Hindu philosophers, it is by no means universally true. Among the causes which the Hindu

Philosophy recognizes, (and here all its schools are again consentient,) not the least remarkable is that which it distinguishes under the title of the *Samavāya* or *Upādāna*—i. e. the *material* cause. When you talk of a house, its efficient cause is the architect; its instrumental cause is the trowel and other instruments; but its material cause is brick and mortar. When you speak of a table, the carpenter is the efficient, his saw and chisel and plainer are the instrumental, but wood is the material cause. When you think of an earthen jar, the potter, the wheel and a dozen other things are to be set down among the efficient, instrumental, and other causes, but the mud of which it is made is the material cause.

Such is according to the tenets of the Hindu philosophy the idea of material causation. It may be true, it is certainly ingenious and harmless to talk in this strain of the effects of human instruments which cannot operate except upon certain pre-existing materials. But the Hindoo philosophy has extended its peculiar idea of causation to the Universe itself. The world must have a *material* as well as an *efficient* cause. The peculiar characteristic of the Vedant theology is derived from this philosophical view of causation. The Nyāya and Sāṅkhya supplied the universe with a *material* cause by assuming the eternity of matter. The Creator operated upon eternally existing atoms or other forms of matter and produced the beauty and symmetry observable in the world. The Divine architect was to the universe merely what the carpenter is to a piece of furniture, or the weaver to an article of dress; but the founders of the Vedant read a different doctrine in the Upanishads. They could not allow the eternity of matter. They could not allow

more than one eternal principle. एकमवादितीयं
was their watch-word. They accordingly loudly

inveighed against the eternity of matter, but asserted a doctrine no less absurd and dangerous. They maintained that Brahma or the Supreme Spirit was himself both the material and efficient cause of the universe ; that he operated upon HIMSELF in his work of Creation : that He was himself the material of which, and the instrument by which, the world was made. They referred to the spider's web as an instance, in which the efficient was identical with the material cause. Brahma created the universe, says the Upanishad by multiplying and producing himself. Not that he said *let there be light and there was light* as the sublime and beautiful cosmogony of Moses has it ; but he looked about himself and conceived the thought

वज्रस्य प्रजायेय

Let me be multiplied—let me be produced, and it was so.

Thus did the philosophy affix its stamp upon the theology of the Vedant. The world (as far as it was called a real entity) was considered as an emanation from Brahm—as consubstantial with him. Hence the sentiment so often repeated in the Upanishads :

सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म

"the whole of this universe is God." Hence the idea pervading the writings of so many Rishis, that nothing exists in reality which is not in him—that as the tree with its stems, branches, foliage, flowers, and fruits is contained in its seed, so is the visible world in Brahm.

न तदस्ति न तस्मिन् यद् विद्यते विततात्मनि ॥

फलपुष्पलतापत्रशाखाविटपमूलवान् ॥ वृक्ष बीज

यथा वृक्ष स्तथदं ब्रह्मणि स्थितं ॥

This peculiar idea of Cosmogony is the fundamental error of the Vedantic theology. It represents the creation as consubstantial with the Creator. The organic and inorganic worlds are of the same material and substance as Brahman. The Upanishads in directing the studies of the theological inquirer point him to that Supreme Being from whom the universe was produced, and in whom *those persons are absorbed who depart from the world for good.**

यत् प्रयत्नमिसम्बन्धन्ति तद्विजिज्ञासख तद्ब्रह्म ॥

And since at the time of the dissolution of the world, distinguished by the name of Mahápralaya, no existing thing must have a separate manifestation, and yet since nothing can be annihilated, the universe becomes identical with Brahman—and is consequently homogenous with him.

The human soul has the highest title to this designation. As the most excellent of the visible creation it is pre-eminently entitled to the dignity of consubstantiality with the Supreme Spirit. It is therefore called *uncreate and eternal*; it was never born nor shall it ever die.†

न जायते म्रियते वा विपश्चित्

But this is a doctrine from which nature may very well revolt. The soul generally remains un-

* The Anglicist Vedantists of Calcutta, in translating this text, conveniently overlook its pantheistic idea.

† Our friends of the Tuttbodhini apply this passage to the Divine Spirit as if it had no reference to the human soul. This is surely an improvement on the Veda and on Shankaracharya its commentator! In the context it is immediately added *it is not destroyed when the body is destroyed*. How can this mean the Supreme Being?

conscious of its dignity as connatural with Brahm. This unconsciousness is stigmatized as gross ignorance. Knowledge is the recognition of Brahma as the one existent cause, (material and efficient,) of the Universe, and as the one Spirit of intelligence pervading the whole creation. Directly the soul acquires this knowledge, it becomes identical with Brahma ;

hence says the Upanishad ब्रह्म वदन्सैव भवति ।

you can then safely accost such a person with the mystical words तत्त्वमसि Thou art He ; He can also

say without egotism or self-conceit अहं ब्रह्मास्मि

I am Brahma. This is another dogma of the Vedant, inculcated in the Vedas and enforced by Vyasa and Shankaracharya—which is no less erroneous and impious than that of the cosmogony.

As a legitimate inference from the preceding doctrine of the identity of the human with the divine spirit, the Vedant concludes that the only felicity which is worthy the dignity of the human soul, is first to be conscious of its consubstantiality with the Supreme Being, and then to be absorbed in the same. All other enjoyments are worthless—the happiness of heaven itself is low in comparison with the joy of final emancipation from the body and from separate existence. Such final emancipation is impossible without absorption—since the soul is always liable to return to the world in an embodied state, since in fact it never leaves one body before another is ready to receive it—until it is finally absorbed in Brahma. The Vedas express the supreme felicity of this emancipation by asserting that it is then free from pain or pleasure.

अशरीरं वाव सन्तं न प्रियाप्रिये स्पृशतः ॥

Such are the peculiar dogmas of the Vedant. It assumes as a first principle in physics that nothing can be produced out of nothing; that the Supreme Being created the world by operating on His own substance and is therefore the material cause of the Universe; that the human soul is an emanation from the Divine Spirit and as such is *unborn* and *eternal*; that the highest felicity of man is to be conscious of his identity with Brahma, and to be emancipated, by absorption in Him, from the burden of the flesh and the necessity of a separate existence.

II. We shall now consider how far these dogmas of the Vedant theology are adapted to the spiritual wants of human nature.

This leads me to inquire what those wants are. These wants arise from the incapacity of this present state of existence for satisfying the natural longings of our hearts. We feel there is immense evil in the world both within and without ourselves. We feel that the words "vanity, corruption and wretchedness" are inscribed in the plainest characters on every thing that is earthly. We feel that, as men, we are in a degraded and degenerate condition. Our minds can conceive and our hearts aspire after a better and a purer state of life, than is to be found on this sublunary globe. We feel that the world, in its best circumstances, is not free from iniquity; that we ourselves are liable to just condemnation because of our many delinquencies. But we are loath to conclude that our condemnation is inevitable. We are impelled to seek a remedy whereby we may be saved from the wrath to come; and since our own wisdom is limited, we are led to exclaim with the psalmist—"Blessed art thou O Lord, teach me thy statutes."

This need of divine instruction is shared by all classes of men. It is the secret of the success which false religions have met with in the world. The high

and low, the learned and unlearned, all require to be guided in the way of peace; and when they cannot find the true way they are liable to go after a false one. The desideratum of a revealed religion is as universal as the sad plight in which we are born. We require a religion which may command the faith, reverence, and admiration of the learned, as well as influence the hearts and minds of the unlearned. We require a doctrine which the Brahmin and the Sudra may equally appreciate and venerate, and which is able to make both wise unto salvation. It must be fitted for operating on the hearts of men without reference to birth and social position. It must be independent of the artificial distinctions of castes and tribes which owe their origin to pride and national prejudices. It must be universal in its adaptation to the wants of men; afford milk to babes and meat to full-grown souls; and prove a common centre of spiritual union and communion to the Jew and Greek—to barbarian, Scythian, bond and free.

The Vedant, however, presents at its very threshold a bar to the great mass of mankind. It is intended for the contemplation of the initiated few. The rules laid down for those who are its *adhiaries*—i. e. who are entitled to be its recipients, are so stringent, as, without great latitude of interpretation, necessarily to exclude every inquirer after truth. In the words of the great founder of the school as interpreted by Sankarácárya, none can be received as a catechumen of the Vedant who has not read the Vedas—who does not discriminate between eternal and non-eternal substances—who has not renounced all desire of enjoyment here or hereafter—who has not subjugated his mind and body, nor is distinguished by patience and faith—and who is not actuated by a desire of liberation.

शान्तो दान्त उपरत स्तितिक्षुः समाहितो भूत्वा

आत्मन्यात्मानं भवलोकेयत् ॥

But none is at liberty to read the Vedas who is not a Brahmin. The founder of the Vedant has himself declared that women and Sudras are not entitled even to hear the holy sentences of the Vedas—

स्त्रीशूद्रद्विजवत्सूनां त्रयी न श्रुति गोचरा ॥

And the Vedas themselves take this exclusiveness for granted when it declares

तमेव मात्मानं वेदानुवचनेन ब्राह्मणा विविदि

षन्ति यज्ञेन ॥

"The BRAHMINS desire to know the Supreme Spirit by sacrifices which are agreeable to the Vedas."

Hence it is evident that the Vedant does not profess to be a religion of universal adaptation. It is a religion of a spiritual aristocracy. It is addressed to none but Brahmins; and to no Brahmins but those who are or consider themselves more enlightened than their neighbours. The great mass of the population have no claims to the privileges of this system. The vast majority of mankind must be content with performing the duties prescribed to their respective classes. The Sudra must serve the Brahmin as the most devout act of which he is capable—nor must he pry into the esoterics of religion until he returns to the world as a Brahmin in a subsequent birth.

I must here acknowledge in candour that some of the Vedantic authors have given a more liberal interpretation to the passages which prescribe the qualifications of Vedantic catechumens.

The Vedas also show that the great devotee Yagnawalka catechized a woman—(his own wife Maitreyi) on the mysteries of religion. Such instances may however be classed among the exceptions. The rule is to confine the knowledge of the Vedant within a very limited circle of learned Brahmins, who are desirous of emancipating themselves from the burden of the flesh.

Nor are the dogmas of the Vedant more suited to the state of mankind at large than its prescribed qualifications. Those who are pressed down under a sense of sin can derive little benefit or consolation from being required to believe that their souls are emanations from Brahma, and that they must sooner or later be absorbed in Him. Those who are distressed with anxieties at the prospect of the wrath to come, cannot but feel it a mockery to be called upon to realize their status as portions of the godhead; nor can their longing after immortality be satisfied with the thought of losing their individual consciousness sooner or later by absorption in the Supreme Spirit. It is after all a species of entire annihilation which the Vedant holds up as the highest boon of which human nature is capable.

III. But I shall now advert in the third place to the obstacles which a sense of our moral responsibility necessarily throws against the reception of Vedantic dogmas either as religious or philosophical truths. It would be foreign to our purpose to notice the theory of causation maintained by the Vedant. Whether philosophy requires of us to distinguish the material causes of the objects investigated is a question which we may on this occasion dismiss without a single remark. We cannot however allow that the necessity of a material cause is *universal*, or that the world stood in need of it at the period of the creation. Our ideas of reverence for the Supreme Being discard the thought

of aspiring to be consubstantial with him. We cannot believe that the universe is a development of Brahm, as the tree is of its seed. We cannot believe that we are of the same substance with the Deity in the same sense in which a jar is of the same substance with clay—or a table with mahogany. The inmost feeling of our nature—such as we cannot renounce without ceasing to be men, forbid such a thought. We are accordingly impelled to enter our protest against the Vedantic dogma of *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahm*—the whole of this universe is God. That must be a spurious philosophy indeed which in its eagerness to satisfy the theory of material causation can allow that a spirit can be the substance of matter—that a quantity which has neither weight nor dimensions can be the basis of that which has length, breadth and thickness—that an intelligent spirit can be the receptacle of gross matter such as is in the world. To such a philosophical absurdity does the idea of the universe being a development of Brahma, like a tree of its seed, necessarily lead. The founders of the Vedant did not stop to consider that there is no analogy between the seed of a tree and the first cause of the universe. The seed and the tree have obviously certain material properties in common; the one may be reasonably considered as the development of the other. But if, as the Vedas declare, Brahma is an immaterial and spiritual being, above the reach of our senses, how can the world, which is material, be a development of him! How can matter be an emanation from spirit. If the Supreme Being be, as his works testify, Almighty, where is the difficulty of supposing that, though man cannot, HE can, by his mere will and pleasure, call any thing into existence out of nothing—and that he could CREATE the universe by his all-powerful fiat. One single text of Moses is a sufficient solution of the problem which seems to have puz-

zled the Vedantic theosophists: **IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.**

Nor can we tolerate the idea that we are uncreate or identical with Brahm. Ambition is undoubtedly to be classed among the useful feelings of human nature, and under proper direction it is capable of achieving good and great ends. But to be equal to or identical with our Creator is an idea that the highest aspiration of the most ambitious character has never yet entertained. Although the writers of the Upanishad and the founder and followers of the Vedant have confidently proclaimed such a theory, we cannot believe they could so far do violence to nature as really to consider themselves identical with Brahm. The idea appeared to them a fine flight of the imagination, and they gave vent to it without calculating on the consequences. But few persons can gravely entertain such an idea in their sober moments.

That all enjoyments here and hereafter are to be eschewed,—and yet the felicity of being absorbed in the Deity is to be sought; that the mind and the body are to be so subdued as to be indifferent to pleasure and pain, and yet existence in the world is to be considered as an intolerable burden; are doctrines inconsistent in themselves and disastrous in their consequences. Works which are styled as *Kamyas*, i. e. performed with the desire of a certain felicity—are deprecated as unworthy and unbecoming. A student of the Vedant must renounce such works before he can be admitted as a catechumen—and yet he must be *Mumukshu* or desirous of emancipation. He is at the same time to renounce ALL desires and yet entertain ONE!

Doctrines such as these can never advance the interests of mankind or administer peace or consolation to them. They are only calculated to harden moral sensibility and to open the floodgates of vice. If a

man can bring himself to believe that his soul is *uncreate*, he cannot believe that he has a Creator—or any Being entitled to his pious veneration. He cannot feel he has a Father or Sovereign in heaven to whom attachment or allegiance is due. He cannot be open to those hopes and fears which the prospect of future rewards or punishments has a tendency to create, and which constitute the greatest and the most powerful inducements to good and moral living.

What practical difference can there be between the atheist who denies the being of a God, and the Vedantist who considers himself as identical with Him, and thereby virtually ignores the existence of an Intelligence superior to himself? The Atheist and the Vedantist alike conspire to deprive the world of a Supreme Ruler and Moral Governor.

The Vedant is generally supposed to be a cure for idolatry. It is difficult to conceive how a system which sets up a limited number, millions though it be, of the celestial hierarchy, can be worse or more mischievous than another which, by its *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahm*, recognizes a god in every soul and thus multiplies the population of heaven without limit.

The truth is, almost any system of religious belief is better than Pantheism. Polytheism, however gross, sets up a definite number of rival gods;—Pantheism does so indefinitely and without end. In the political world he that declares that every subject is a king, not only degrades, but actually reduces to naught, the dignity of the Sovereign—and is guilty of more aggravated treason than he who sets up a limited number of pretenders. The case is analogous in religion. He that deifies every soul is guilty of a more atrocious sin against Heaven, than he who puts up a *given* number of gods.

Pantheism, in fine, can never promote piety or re-

ligious sentiment. It can only dry up and destroy such feelings. The infatuated victims of the Vedant have given utterance to language, the blasphemous arrogance of which would shock the feelings of the coldest theologian. The son of the Founder himself boldly exclaims in a number of couplets, technically known by the name of the *Sukastac*, that the soul, which is really enlightened, is by virtue of its identity with Brahma, subject to no duty—that he is above the bondage of injunction or prohibition, and is bound by no law. And the learned commentator of the Upanishad and the Sūtras—the most venerated champion of the system—has in his manual of the Vedant, called the *hastamalak* himself represented a boy who had persuaded his mind to believe that he was identical with the Deity—and who in a string of doxologies set forth his divine dignity by engrossing to himself the attributes peculiar to the Supreme Being. I will quote but one out of the twelve self-doxologies which the manual contains---and which will sufficiently demonstrate the impious tendency of the Vedant:

मनश्चक्षुरादे विमृक्षः स्वयं योमनश्चक्षुरादे
मनश्चक्षुरादिः ॥ मनश्चक्षुरादे रगम्यस्वरूपः
सनियोपलब्धि स्वरूपोद्दमात्मा ॥

“I am that eternal Spirit of Intelligence, who, though distinct from the mind, the eye, and the other senses, is yet the mind of the mind, the eye of the eye, and who is beyond the reach of those senses.”

This doxological egotism from the pen of San-karāchārya himself is a sufficient proof of the monstrous infatuation which the successful propagation of the Vedant has a tendency to produce.

IV. But it is time to ask in the fourth place what authority have the founders of the Vedant in propounding doctrines so revolting to our moral sensibilities. What authority have they to detract from the glory of the Supreme Being by declaring that the human soul is identical with him! What right have they to give out that Brahma produced the world from a desire of multiplying himself—that the world existed in him before the Creation? We have already shown that their dogmas are opposed to our notions of moral propriety. It is time to call for their authority in laying down doctrines so subversive of the idea of moral responsibility and therefore tending to destroy the bonds of human society.

The dogmas of the Vedant profess to be founded upon the Upanishads. But what evidences can be adduced in support of their pretensions to divine inspiration—or rather in support of the idea that they contain the word of God? for it is by no means clear that the Upanishads themselves pretend to divine authority.* I will not detract from the merits of the authors of the Upanishads as human writers.

They taught what they believed; they believed what they thought; they thought what their reveries suggested. I believe their speculations were no better than what our poet calls *Jagratswapna* or day-dreams. But still until I have satisfactory proof of their pretending to divine inspiration, I have no right to apply to them the unenviable epithet which the general consent of mankind has set apart for the founder of

* I am aware of the passage quoted by Sankaracharya

अस्य महतो भूतस्य निश्चित मेतद्यद्वेदः ॥

but I am not sure that it can be considered a pretension on the part of the Upanishads themselves for their own inspiration.

Islamism. There is no evidence that the Rishis who indited the Upanishads uttered them as any other than their own doctrines. They spoke no doubt more authoritatively than is conformable to our ideas of modesty; but the reverence which the pupil rendered to the tutor was proverbially extravagant in Asia. *Ipsé dixit* was a more constant watchword with the disciples of Vyas or Kapila than even those of Pythagoras. The circumstances of the country would therefore be great palliations for the tutors assuming such an air of authority. But it does not appear that the authors pretended to a revelation from God in propounding their dogmas.

The founders and followers of the Vedant do the Upanishads great injury in attaching divine authority to them. However unwilling I am to risk a universal negation, I feel myself justified in declaring that the inspiration of the Vedas and the Upanishads can never be proved. What is the story of their origin? The traditional legend is that they were revealed by Brahma himself at the Creation. This is a bold assertion, and, if it is intended that rational thinkers are to swallow it down without a murmur, it is no less presumptuous than it is bold. It is no less presumptuous than bold to call upon men to believe that the Vedas were revealed at the Creation, though they contain historical narrations of events that transpired long after, and purport to be the compositions of Rishis that lived in subsequent ages.

This consideration is fatal to the idea of Vedic inspiration. The idea was probably propagated in a rude state of society when the population was generally illiterate and at the mercy of the Brahmins. They accordingly propounded what they pleased without anticipating the verdict of posterity. The most childish tales accordingly gained credit and were handed down from generation to generation.

But the bold asserters of the eternity of the Vedas have outwitted themselves. They did not stop to reflect that by pretending to invest their Scriptures with a higher authority than time itself could allow, they precluded every possibility of their being proveable to be genuine or authentic. If the Vedas were revealed at the creation,---o whom and when, and where, and how and in what language was the revelation made? How do you know that it was really revealed? What direct testimony can be produced in support of the allegation? What proof can there be of their uncorrupted preservation? Questions like these can be multiplied to which it would be impossible for Brahminical ingenuity to frame replies.

We can confidently challenge any advocate of the Vedant to prove the divine authority of the Vedas, or even to give a consistent account of their preservation from time immemorial. We have little apprehension of our gauntlet being taken up by any party. We earnestly request you to consider that if the divine authority of the Vedas is not proveable, the system which professes to be founded upon them must crumble to the dust;---the revolting doctrines which the Upanishads inculcated should be repudiated by every intelligent and rational agent.

The compiler of the Vedas and the founder of the Vedant, asserts in his third Sutra, that the Shasters or Vedas are of divine authority. His commentator Shankaràcharya undertakes to demonstrate that assertion by saying,

न हि ईदृशस्य शास्त्रस्य ऋग्वेदादि सत्त्वणस्य
सर्वज्ञ गुणान्वितस्य सर्वज्ञादन्यतः सम्भवोस्ति ॥

"Shasters like the Rig Veda which contain proofs of Omniscience could not have been produced from other

than an omniscient spirit." The commentator here conveniently takes for granted the very thing to be proved. He gravely asserts that the Rig Veda contains proofs of omniscience—and thence deduces the divine authority of the Vedas. And what are these proofs of omniscience? Hymns and invocations to Agni Vayu and Indra? * Legendary accounts of Rishis and pantheistic representations of Brahma? They are rather evidences of the Vedas having been indited by perverse theologians and spurious philosophers.

Our friends of the *Tattvabodhini* society once published a paper on the divine authority of the Vedas. They there acknowledged that no historical proofs can be adduced of the inspiration of the Vedas. They maintained that since the doctrines of the Vedas were reasonable, none but the divine spirit could have inspired them. This argument is scarcely a better attempt at Logic than Shankarâcharya. If every book which convey a reasonable idea be a revelation from God, then there would be no end to our Shasters. Then even nursery rhymes may lay claims to this dignity.

In fine, I may safely declare that it is impossible to prove the divine authority of the Vedas; and that the revolting doctrines before alluded to are gratuitous assertions of the Rishis who put forth the Upanishads.

V. I will now advert to the fifth and last division of my discourse—namely, the attempts which have been recently made to revive the credit of the Vedant. Having already detained you so long I am unwilling to dwell on this point for a great while—and yet the subject is

* It is not by no means clear whether the authors of the earlier Vedas possessed any idea of the Divine Unity. Professor Wilson says, "whether their authors entertained any belief in a Creator and Ruler of the Universe certainly does not appear from any passage hitherto met with."—(Preface to Translation of the Rig Veda.)

too interesting to be passed over in a hurry. The recent attempts to revive the credit of the Vedant naturally remind us of one of the most energetic sons of our country—now no more in the land of the living. The memory of Rajah Rammohun Roy a Bengalee can never cease to regard with honor and respect. The first Hindoo that braved the perils of the sea, and was in a distant land honoured by the sovereign to whom Providence has entrusted the management of this magnificent empire, as well as by the Company to whom its Government is delegated by that sovereign—deserves to have his name recorded in the annals of India. It is not likely that any Hindoo with ordinary common sense and good taste will manifest a rude disregard to him or his opinions. But with the highest veneration for his memory, one cannot deny that his attempt to revive the credit of the Vedant was a signal failure. That the attempt has been attended with collateral advantages must be thankfully acknowledged and gratefully remembered; but it must be candidly stated that in professing to be an advocate of the Vedant, he mistook his aim both as a patriot, a philosopher and a theological reformer. He mistook his aim as a patriot, because he should have known that there was nothing in that pantheistic theory tending to improve the morals, or elevate the condition of his countrymen. He erred as a philosopher, because he undertook to defend an antiquated doctrine which he seemed himself to have outgrown. He misdirected his energies as a theological reformer, because he preached a dogma which while it exalted a particular mode of contemplating the Deity tolerated the lowest forms of idolatry existing in the country, as proper for those whose mental condition did not entitle them to the privileges of esoteric Hinduism. I am not finding fault with Rammohun Roy in the spirit of a cavalier. His memory, I repeat, I cannot but venerate. His example imparted an impetus to free inquiry which

must sooner or later produce consequences which perhaps he never calculated. Unfortunately for all, he had imbibed hasty prejudices against the Gospel. Under the influence of his own convert to Unitarianism—the second fallen Adam as a Christian controversialist of the day designated him—he seems to have been encouraged to believe that the doctrines of the Bible and the Vedas were alike—that pantheism was identical with monotheism—and that it was the same thing whether a person believed in one God—or whether he conceived every living soul to be identical with God. This was the most deplorable error in Rammohun Roy's system. He confined his attention to those texts of the Vedas, or rather the Upanishads, which asserted the unity of God, but overlooked other passages that sapped at the foundation of all distinction between the creature and the Creator. He laid undue stress upon those passages of the Vedas which inculcated the duty of contemplating Brahma, but glossed over others that supported and enjoined the practice of idolatry. His was a new Vedantism, unknown to Vyass and Shankarācharya. He gave it a polish which was borrowed from English or rather Christian works—and recast the system of the Vedas in a foreign mould. His orthodox countrymen broke many a lance with him in the arena of theological controversy; and it must be acknowledged that in a controversy in which the authority of both Veds and Purana was acknowledged by the parties, the advocate of popular Hinduism had a substantial advantage over one who, however superior in intellect, spoiled his cause by bowing before the authority of the Shasters which certainly taught both pantheism and idolatry.

For some time after the death of Rammohun Roy the cause of his Neo-Vedantism appeared to expire. It has however since revived under the auspices of the *Tuttbodhini Sobhá*. For the leader of this *Sobhá* and for the distinguished family of which he is a mem-

ber, I entertain the greatest regard. I believe him to be guided by the sincerest desire of improving his country; but I must nevertheless regret that he adopted so inefficient a means for encompassing his patriotic end. The *Anglicised* Vedant, inculcated by the Tuttbodhini Sobhâ, is neither the doctrine of the Upanishads nor of pure theism. As admirers of Bacon and Newton, the members of the Sobhâ are ashamed to own the pantheistic or idolatrous teaching of the Vedas, such as *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma—or Brahma-vid Brahmaiva bhavati*—and yet by attaching divine authority to the Vedas they are obliged to connive at both the idolatry and pantheism inculcated in them. It is impossible to account for the inveterate prejudices they have contracted against Christianity. Although the pure monotheism which they profess may square with the doctrines and precepts of the Bible more readily than with the puerile and unholy observances of popular Hinduism, yet they appear desirous of supporting the worst forms of polytheism rather than tolerate Christianity. Witness their confederacy five years ago with the advocates of idolatry for opposing the Missionary Schools of Calcutta. Witness their late combination with the most bigoted portion of their countrymen in order to oppose the Act popularly called the *Lex loci*.

These modern Vedantists profess to reform the idolatry of their countrymen - and yet they receive as the word of God those very Vedas which notwithstanding their doctrine of one Brahm (which by the way is pantheistic) inculcate for the most part a system of elemental idolatry, though without the intervention of graven images. Such an attempt to reform idolatry and on such principles would be almost incredible, did we not perceive in their writings their avowed motive of opposing the progress of Christianity. They have openly declared that their object in planting the standard of

this New Vedantism is to form a rallying point for those educated Hindus who, disgusted with the absurdities of the popular Hinduism, evince an inclination to join the ranks of Christianity. It is not so much a regard for Vedantism as hostility to the Christian religion that seems to animate these reformers of India.

However sceptical in their consideration of the claims of Christianity, the members of the Tuttbodhini Sabha have shown themselves to be very easy in their reception of the Vedas. They admit that there are no historical evidences for the inspiration or authenticity of the Vedas—and yet they cling to the notion of their being the word of God, because, they say, the doctrines contained in them are very reasonable. How far the doctrines of the Vedas are really reasonable may be collected from what has been already said of their idolatrous and pantheistic teaching. But the principle on which the Tuttbodhini Sabha founds the divine authority of the Vedas is the most extraordinary we have ever heard. They concede that there are no external evidences for the inspiration of the Vedas, and yet they receive them as the word of God, because the contents are reasonable. Is then every book which contains reasonable doctrine to be received as a revelation. Then may the works of Galileo and Newton, of Bacon and Butler, lay far higher claims to this title, for they contain doctrines far more reasonable and far more important than any portion of the Vedas.

But I will willingly believe that it is respect for the opinions and practices of our ancestors, the primitive Hindus, which actuates the movements of the Tuttbodhini Sabha. Respect for national antiquity is no doubt a good feeling; a reckless disregard of one's ancestors is decidedly indicative of ingratitude and perverseness. But as in other questions so also in this, our duty to God and Truth must be paramount. We ought certainly to respect the memory of our forefathers—but that respect

must be regulated by our regard for Truth. In many things however the *Tuttbodhini Sobha*, like other bodies of their countrymen, run counter to the opinions and practices of the primitive Hindus. Why then obstruct the progress of Truth under colour of respect to our ancestors?

Again, granting we ought to cherish the opinions held by our primitive forefathers, why stop the investigation as to what those opinions were, when you ascend a certain height? Why stop at Vyas, or Mean, or Yagnawalca? Why not ascend higher and higher—until you reach the age of the first patriarch of the post-diluvian world. Why not freely inquire as to who the first patriarch really was, and what his opinions and practices were? And if, as is most likely, the first patriarch is proved to be Noah—the preacher of righteousness—why not inquire with redoubled ardour as to how he worshipped his God, and on what doctrine he rested for peace and salvation? Here you will show your respect for your primitive ancestors in a more comprehensive manner, than by clinging to a particular age, and refusing to ascend higher in the links of antiquity.

Again, as a body of practical reformers, the attempts of the new Vedantists have been entirely unsuccessful. The pure theism which they profess seems invariably to evaporate the moment they walk out of the doors of the *Brahma Samaj* or the meetings of the *Tuttbodhini*. Although this new Vedantism has now been proclaimed for forty years since the beginning of Rammohun Roy's career, yet it has never produced any practical change for the better in the institutions of the country. The only practical measure it once originated or supported was a memorial to Government against the burning of widows. But as far as the debasing idolatry and the corrupt institutions of the country are concerned, the new Vedantism of the *Tuttbodhini* has done nothing for

their discontinuance. We have never yet heard of any champion of Neo-Vedantism entering a practical protest against early marriages, polygamy, the unsocial separation of castes, or the cruel prohibition of marriage to widows. We have never yet heard of a heroic Vedantist refusing to sacrifice his daughter on the hymeneal altar in her tender age of infancy as a peace offering to the idol *Lokachar* or custom. We have never yet known an advocate of this pure Hinduism proclaim liberty and emancipation to his captives in the zenana, or oppose the unnatural division of caste by actually breaking through its trammels. We have never yet witnessed a Brähma of the Tuttbodhini Sobha spend much of his energies in the cause of female education or domestic reform—or in any other scheme calculated to ameliorate the social condition of our countrymen. On the contrary, we have heard lamentable reports of leaders of this new school setting themselves in opposition to justice, equity and liberty of conscience; proposing the expulsion of masters and pupils from public institutions on the score of a difference of opinion in religion; and unblushingly taking their places in the ranks of bigotry and intolerance.

Are such doctrines and practices to improve the moral and social condition of India? To patch up in theory the hideous doctrines of pantheism and to continue idolaters in practice; to preach Vedantism in the Brahma Samaj, but to conform to the ritual of the Purans without its walls; to proclaim the unity of God with stammering tongue, but sanction female ignorance, female captivity, early marriages, polygamy and the monstrous evils of caste; such practices as these will never regenerate India.

But I must now conclude. I only wish to remind you before we part this evening that the much-talked of Vedant is a system not of monotheism, but of pantheism; not of the unity, but of the universality of God; not one

that encourages you to reverence and adore your Creator, but one that exhorts you to think yourselves to be identical with him; not one that interdicts idolatry but one that holds it up as the necessary duty of the greatest mass of mankind, who are not entitled to be catechumens of the Vedant, who must therefore be contented with worshipping wood and stone. Such a doctrine can never be a cure for idolatry, or a remedy for the perils of our country. You must look for something more godly and more humane—something that will exalt the Deity instead of degrading him as homogeneous with his creatures—something that will satisfy the cravings of human nature by proclaiming pardon of sin, instead of mocking its votaries by the vain hope of being identical with the Almighty—something that will bring life and immortality to light, instead of inculcating the destruction of our separate consciousness which will amount to utter annihilation.

Whether God has revealed such a remedy for the perils of human nature will be discussed by the worthier persons who will follow me in prosecution of this series. I do not wish to anticipate them. But as a Christian minister, I cannot part from you to-night without asserting what those who are to follow me will fully demonstrate, that the true remedy for the perils of a nation is to be found in the Bible;—that the mental peace and spiritual consolation for which our ancestors looked in vain to the mummeries of the Vedas and Puranas, and to the revolting pantheism of the Upanishads, are administered by the grace of God that bringeth salvation and hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ—to whom with the Father and the Blessed Spirit be ascribed as is most due all honor, glory, majesty and dominion for ever and ever!